

424 THE BALLAD OF
READING GAO1,

But neither milk-white rose nor red
May bloom in prison-air;
The shard, the pebble, and the flint,
Are what they give us there:
For flowers have been known to heal
A common man's despair.

So never will wine-red rose or white,
Petal by petal, fall
On that stretch of mud and sand that
lies?
By the hideous prison-wall,
To tell the men who tramp the yard
That God's Son died for all.

Yet though the hideous
prison-wall
Still hems him round and
round,
And a spirit may not walk by
night
That is with fetters
bound,
And a spirit may but weep
that lies
In such unholy ground,

He is at peace—this wretched man—
At Peace, or will be soon:
There is no thing to make him mad,
Nor does Terror walk at noon,
For the lampless Earth in which he
lies
Has neither Sun nor Moon.

They hanged him as a beast is
hanged:
They did not even toll
A requiem that might have brought
Rest to his startled soul.
But hurriedly they took him out.
And hid him in a hole.

They stripped him of his canvas
clothes,
And gave him to the flies:
They mocked the swollen purple
throat,
And the stark and staring eyes:
And with laughter loud they heaped
the shroud
In which their convict lies.